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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (08/17): Internal Fatah elections are complete, now the work must start

Main Stories:

The local press runs prominent coverage of the first meeting of the newly elected Fatah Central Committee and Revolutionary Council in Ramallah on August 16. Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas reiterated that the Palestinian Authority and Fatah are committed to pursuing a national unity dialogue with Hamas and will work hard towards establishing an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders. Abbas noted that an extraordinary session of the Palestinian National Council will be held in Ramallah on August 26-27 to elect 6 new members to fill the current vacancies of the Central Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Abbas also stressed that the PA is ready to immediately pursue negotiations with Israel if the latter completely halts settlement activity.

News on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's visit to Washington on August 18 receives front page coverage in the three dailies. The reports quote Egyptian Presidency Spokesperson Sulaiman Awwad saying that Mubarak will communicate the Arab vision for achieving peace in the Middle East with President Obama so that he can take it into consideration prior to announcing the anticipated US peace plan next month.

Al-Quds runs front page news citing a CNN interview with the Israeli Ambassador to the US Michael Oren during which he noted that any land exchange deal with the Palestinian Authority "within the final status settlement" will likely include exchanging Arab areas located inside Israel.

Weekend Stories:

Sunday, August 16:

All dailies front page stories on the clashes in Rafah during which 28 were killed and more than 130 were injured. The PA announced that it was following the events in the Gaza Strip with great concern. Reports note that the PA stressed that these clashes were a natural result of the Hamas takeover in Gaza that divided the homeland and led to the absence of a legitimate authority. The PA also stated that Hamas has adopted policies that create an atmosphere conducive to the emergence of fundamentalist groups that do not represent true Islam and the real values and ideals of the Palestinian people.

All dailies front page news that President Abbas closed the proceedings of the sixth Fatah party conference in Bethlehem following the announcement of the 81 winners of the election for the movement's Revolutionary Council on August 15.

All dailies also front page news on the PLO Executive Committee's meeting August 15 chaired by President Abbas. The Executive Committee made a statement following its meeting denouncing the killings and destruction in Gaza by Hamas that are increasing the suffering of the people and dividing the unity of the homeland. The Committee also stressed that the only option for the success of the national dialogue is to hold legislative and presidential elections, as well as elections for the Palestinian National Council, at the beginning of next year. Furthermore, the Executive Committee stated that it is seriously considering calling for a UN Security Council

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session to address the "on-going Israeli violations" in Jerusalem and throughout the Palestinian Territories.

Saturday, August 15:

All dailies front page news on fierce armed clashes that broke out August 14 in Rafah governorate between Hamas security forces in Gaza and armed militants from the "Jund Ansar Allah" (Army of the Partisans of God), a Salafist group. According to different sources, the clashes broke out following the Friday sermon by the Imam of Ibn Taimiyyah mosque Sheikh Abdul Latif Mousa, during which he attacked Hamas and declared the establishment of an Islamic principality in Gaza. Hamas Spokesperson Taher Nounou held Abdul Latif Mousa and his followers responsible for what happened as a result of his irresponsible declaration during the Friday sermon. Nounou added that "we will not allow the state of lawlessness to return under any circumstances." Nounou demanded all followers of this group to hand over their weapons and surrender to the police. Ismail Haniyyeh, head of Hamas in Gaza, denied reports that his government is taking an extremist Islamist approach to govern Gaza and added "the Hamas movement in Palestine is a centrist and moderate movement with clear and defined objectives." Haniyyeh also stressed the need for reconciliation and agreement prior to Palestinian general elections, but added "our movement does not trust the Fatah leadership to conduct fair elections in the West Bank."

All dailies run front page coverage on PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad stating in an interview with Israeli newspaper Haaretz that the character of the State of Israel is an Israeli affair and not for Palestinians to define. Fayyad's statements came in the context of responding to demands by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for the PA to recognize Israel as a Jewish state as a pre-condition for resuming negotiations. Fayyad added "the way Israel wants to define itself is an Israeli matter; it can describe and define itself in the manner that it pleases." Fayyad also said "the Oslo agreements did not include this condition and I do not see any space for adding new conditions or pre-conditions for negotiations now." Additionally, Fayyad stressed that he is seeking to prove to the world that the Palestinian people are capable of building their own state.

All dailies also run front page coverage on Israeli sources stating that secret negotiations took place recently between senior US and Israeli officials to reach an agreement for freezing settlement

activities. The sources said that the main disagreements were the length of the freeze and the conditions under which Israel can resume construction. Reports note that the US wants an Israeli commitment to freeze settlement activities for two years, with the understanding that this would be the period during which negotiations over final status issues will be conducted. Netanyahu reportedly refused this idea and said Israel will only agree to freeze settlement activities for three months and if the Arab side fails to fulfil their commitments to normalize relations with Israel, Israel would be absolved of its commitments and will resume settlement activities.-----

BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al-Quds independent daily runs an editorial under the title, "Towards a new phase of national unity" (08/17): "All Palestinian factions including Hamas and Fatah must realize how valuable it is at this stage to end the division and to prioritize the interests of their people. They should understand that it is extremely important

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that we appear united to the international community, with a unified position and unified power. Only then will we stand a chance to achieve our goals to have our state."

2) Atef Abu Seif opines in Al-Ayyam independent daily under the headline "Fatah mission has started" (08/17): "Fatah has successfully concluded its sixth conference, but the real work has
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only started ... it has to work on many difficult issues. It has to regain people's trust and confidence. It needs to not only make statements but do real work. If it fails to do so right away, it will be lost forever."

WALLES